

Making Your Website Great

by Cheryl Harrison

Your church is an expression of the Divine. And your church website? If it is less than wonderful, breathe ... and consider just **three practical reasons to make it great:**

1 The ways people find Unity churches may be changing. Traditionally, 70 percent have come with friends. Today, 70 percent of people looking for a new church home look for it on the Internet. Half of all newcomers to New Life Unity Church in Tampa, Florida, have found that new church through its website, reports Virginia Walsh, the founding minister.

2 There's no going back now. Just seven years ago, only one in five Internet users visited a church or other religious website. Today, two of every three Internet users turn to the web for information about churches, religion and spirituality, according to studies funded by the Pew Internet & American Life Project.

3 People who use the Internet for religious or spiritual purposes are in a position to provide a lot of support to the churches that attract them, the Pew Project reports. The Internet's spiritual seekers are more likely to be middle-aged, college-educated, and relatively well-to-do ... and there are a lot of them—more than eight million in the U.S. alone.



How Do I Make My Website Great?

Whatever the condition of your website—wonderful or woeful, or worse (you have none)—here are just a few tips for making it great:

- Make sure that most or all of your home page is visible when the page opens. Many visitors to your website will not scroll down, so they'll never see the info that's below the bottom of the opening screen.
- Welcome outsiders by using only inclusive, commonly understood language in your website copy. If you want newcomers to feel really at home, avoid terms and acronyms commonly used in New Thought but not in the mainstream press ("Truth principles," "ACIM" for A Course in Miracles).
- Publish real people's pictures and stories about how they found Unity (and why they love it). These vignettes will help web visitors connect ahead of time to your community. People connect to people!
- Here's a "don't": Don't use an entry page (a "splash page") featuring a movie, music or sign-up form, to open your website. Splash pages "are intensely irritating to users," note the experts at www.gospelcom.net. "Equally annoying are websites that automatically play music when the visitor arrives at the home page." Many will simply leave your site, rather than click through to your home page.

Go to www.WeeklyWebTips.wordpress.com for lots of other great ideas.

Cheryl Harrison is the founding director of Friends of Ministry, Inc. She is the former marketing, events, and volunteer director for First Unity Church in St. Petersburg, Florida.